

The Hammer





The Hammer

CPCC'S STUDENT ARTS & LITERATURE MAGAZINE



2018

THE HAMMER

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The Hammer is CPCC's student Arts & Literature magazine. Founded in 2017, The Hammer is based in Charlotte, North Carolina. All visual, literary, and graphic arts herein were crafted, written, and designed by current students of Central Piedmont Community College.

Some literary works included are winners of the local level of a national literary competition sponsored by the League for Innovation in the Community College, and are marked as such.

Visual art taken from the Annual Juried Student exhibit, which showcases top talent among our students at CPCC, highlighting the variety and skill in our Visual Arts program.

Questions or comments? Please send a message to the editor at colin.hickey@cpcc.edu

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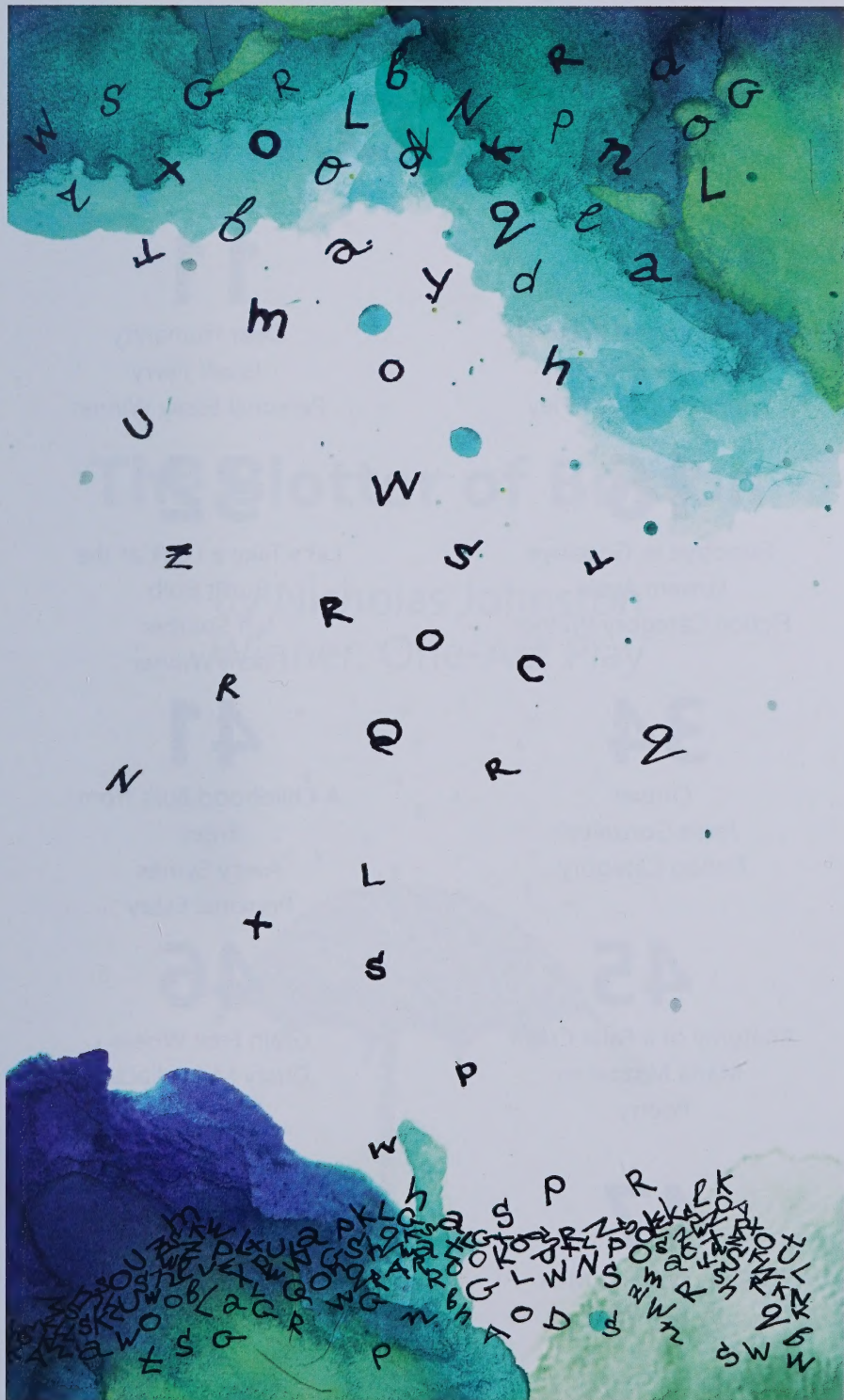


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The Blotter of Boston

By Nicholas Johnston
Winner: One-Act Play



Act I

The scene begins in a living room. There is a desk to the stage right. Stage left there's a coat rack next to a door leading to and outside.

A man is at the desk focusing on writing.

Martin

An angelic glow washed through the room as she entered.

The woman that Martin is writing about appears stage right. She is acting out what Martin is writing.

Martin

Her eyes were as blue as the...

As blue as...

The woman is now waiting for Martin to make up his mind.

Martin

Her eyes were as blue...

The woman relaxes herself

Woman

The morpho butterfly? a robin's egg? The ocean? Out with it now!

Martin

Her eyes were blue. A pale yet vibrant blue.

Woman

In a mocking tone

Facilitating a story about a pretty woman with "vibrant" blue eyes.

Martin appears frustrated.

There's a knocking at the door .

Martin

One moment!

Martin tosses the paper he was writing on to the side and the woman in the scene leaves the stage in the same way the paper leaves the desk.

Martin gets up from the desk and answers the door.

Allen walks in carrying an umbrella and takes off his coat

Allen

Three days of rain, you'd think Boston to mirror that of Venice.

Martin take Allen's coat and umbrella.

Martin

I've been losing count of the days as of recent.

Martin hangs the coat and set the umbrella against the wall.

Allen

If you remain secluded in your flat you may very well lose more than your count.

Martin

My mind has done me well. Had you chance to read the

story I sent you?

Allen

I have.

Martin

As forthcoming as a safe.

Must I pry for an opinion?

Allen

To be perfectly candid, it was arid and lacking in motivation.

Martin

Have I offended in any manner?

Allen

You must see by now this is no means to an end?

Martin

I apologize if I've ever been hard of hearing on this matter. It's difficult to hear you from atop that mighty high throne.

Allen

Well surely you can't tell me that you find more comfort in a stomach as empty as your pockets?

Martin

Brother it is this very craft that sustains me. It brings me hope that one day I will find sustenance in something I love.

Allen

And if you love to starve, then irony has made you a

perfect pair. I say once more come work with me. A teller's pay may help you fill your cupboard and indulge this hobby at your leisure.

Martin

This is more than just a hobby. It is a medium for the expression of my soul.

Allen

Your soul is far more expressive than this medium I assure you.

Martin

And so I continue to refine!

Allen

If transposed to better work I cannot fathom the things you'd accomplish. But this lecture has long expired in my mind. Martin, you are a man whom I do envy for... Lifts the bottle of whiskey on the desk.

Well certainly not your taste in spirit... But your spirit all the same. I feel cheated to be given bond with someone who could sculpt a masterpiece but instead chooses to make bed of the clay and rest on it until it hardens beneath him.

Martin

It is easier to rest of a hard bed when it is to your shape.

I wish you could see. Perhaps it is in our nature to bear this impasse.

Allen

Perhaps indeed... No matter, I do arrive with news.

Martin

Better than your criticisms my work I hope.

Allen

After squaring away the last of his finances it appears his flat will be under foreclosure.

Martin

How can that be?

Allen

Well I believe for the same reason you exemplify your passion for writing. Frankly, it comes as no surprise to me that an eccentric such as our uncle would have such unworldly understanding. *Martin seemingly frustrated by this walks to his desk and sits down.*

Martin

So what am I to do?

Allen

Take the work which I offered you. Pay the dues and hopefully you'll find that this is an honest labor.

Martin reaches for his bottle and a glass to pour a drink but is

subtly stopped by Allen.

Allen

I fear you to drink alone tonight but I must be off.

Allen reaches into his pocket and pulls out a bill and places it on the table.

Pay the tavern a visit. Company may better suit you.

Martin

An act of pity?

Allen

An act of compassion.

Allen heads for the door and grabs his coat. The umbrella is still by the door.

Be sure you wear your thickest coat, for this rain may turn to snow and ice.

Allen exits.

Martin sits at the desk his hands covering his face and the woman walks back into scene. She is dusting herself off.

Woman

Well it was no masterpiece but it certainly didn't merit that response. Arid? Clearly he doesn't consider his wit in comparison. And where does he find nerve to offer these handouts? Surely this charity is of dishonorable motive. The nerve to think he knows of what's best for any man.

The Hammer

Martin lifts up from the desk

Martin

Perhaps this trip to the tavern could ease my troubled mind.

Martin grabs the bill upon the desk retrieves his coat and exits from the door.

Woman

Who does that man think he is?

The lights fade on the scene to transition to the next

The sound of thunder can be heard in this scene change.

Martin comes charging through the door in distress. He looks awash in guilt and is breathing heavily as though he ran for quite some time. He makes his way to his desk and throws up behind it.

Martin

What was I to do?

I was harrassed.

There was no malice. For every outcome...

It was hardly my action which sealed this man's fate.

Martin sits in the chair at the desk and with shaky hands attempts to pour a glass.

He gets it most everywhere along the desk and in a fit of

rage throws the glass.

He is stunned and drinks from the bottle.

The woman enters stage right.

Woman

Well this is hardly your fault. What were you to do?

She circles around the desk to Martins side

You politely refused to give the little change you had. If anything that man got what was coming to him.

and looks down at the place Martin vomited.

We should really clean that up sooner than later.

She hovers over Martin.

You did what any man would have, You defended yourself and the offender paid the price.

Surely the streets of Boston will not miss a beggar such as he?

Better he contribute to the creatures of the harbor rather only take from those above?

Martin

I cannot make peace with this.

Martin takes a pull from the bottle.

He looks down at his desk he

wipes with one arm the booze from it and opens a drawer retrieving paper.

Woman

There must be better ways to handle your guilt.

Martin

But none hold the hope of confessing this instance so I may drain myself of this plague.

Martin continues writing and the woman in the background rolls her eyes and walks back around the desk to exit as the scene fades.

The next scene opens with Martin passed out at the desk. The bottle on his desk is empty and he still has a pen in hand.

There is a knocking at the door. Martin is unresponsive after the first few knocks. He wakes up slowly accelerating to skittish as he partly recalls last night.

Martin

Who's there?

Allen

It's the police and the flat is surrounded.

Martin is irritated by this response and goes to answer the door.

Allen enters the flat.

Allen

I forgot my umbrella the other day and I figured I'd stop by to retrieve it.

Allen looks at the desk with the empty bottle.

So it seems you didn't go out last night.

I hope you still used the time to consider my offer.

Martin still standing by the door sees this as a way to cover his tracks.

Martin

I prefer to remain alone as you know. As for your offer I do not seek your pity.

Allen looks down at the desk and behind it. He makes a face as though he has seen the vomit from the previous night.

Allen

Yet you constantly seek my approval. How many more stories of yours shall I criticize until you see the easiest path to it?

He picks up a paper off the desk and begins to read it.

I suppose this is where your time went last evening?

Martin realizes just what that paper is that Allen is reading and begins to panic jolting over to Allen.

Martin

That story is not prepared...
*Allen stops Martin with a finger
and continues to read in silence.*

Allen

Martin this is...
*Martin is incredibly tense and
bursting with anxiety. He
snatches the paper from Allen's
hand.*

Martin

UNFINISHED!
*Martin walks to the other side of
the room with the paper in hand
as Allen looks at him.*

Allen

Extraordinary.
Martin turns around perplexed.

Martin

I beg your pardon?

Allen

I can hardly be certain this
is your work at all. The level
of detail is unparalleled. You
must let me finish it. I beg of
you.

*Martin is stunned by this but
attempts to play it off.*

Martin

When it is finished I'll let you
be the first.

Allen

This work is superb, you
must have it published. I
know just the man who can

help you.

*Allen makes his way for the
door.*

Martin

The story is still unfinished!

Allen

And so I will eagerly return!
*Martin goes to his desk and sits
down at it trying to process all of
this. He begins to read the
confession he wrote the previous
night.*

*The woman enters from her
usual place.*

Woman

Well that was unexpected.
He's right you know. Just
look at this, a breath of
poetic genius. All of these
years you had this living
inside you. And at what cost?
A beggar whose life likely
would be taken by a snowy
evening.

Martin

This is unequivocally my best
work.

Woman

But what if you can't do it
again? It appears you've set
a new standard expectation.

Martin

You're right. He'll begin to
suspect my writing wasn't
pure chance.

Woman

Well when I want to remember something. I like to recreate that instance.

Martin

But I don't think I could bear that guilt once more.

Woman

I'm not implying you go strangle a nun. I'm simply saying there's a lot of vicious, awful people in Boston and would it be such a shame that they'd meet an untimely demise? It could almost be like you're doing Boston a favor.

Martin

But truly what favor do I do the families of these poor souls?

Woman

With any keen observation perhaps some good.

Martin

Perhaps.

Woman

Still haven't cleaned that vomit yet.

Martin

Oh yes.

Scene fades and end of Act I of III





Laura Steele Walsh

Title: View of Tuscany

Medium: Oil on canvasSize: 20" x 24"

Dear Humanity

By Joseff Perry
Personal Essay Winner



Dear Humanity,

I remember the day you discovered me. I mean, I had been around on this earth since God formed it, but when you found me it was, different. You were like, way different. Seriously, all hair, made grunting and gurgling noises with the things you call mouths and moving rather clumsily using what you called hands; the smell was just horrid, makes me glad when soap was finally invented. Thus, two rocks smashed together, a spark, some dry grass and there I was, you had found me. Yes, dear humanity, you had discovered fire. Well, rather you found a way to tame me; to keep me from scorching everything I touched. I smiled up, waving. Your childlike curiosity, all the grunts and cries, were humorous. You became mystified by how I moved, breathed, and ate. You were enchanted by my warmth, by how I crackled and snapped in the evening air, by how I was calm when the wind was still and roaring when it blew through me. That's when you had the bright idea to touch me. Gingerly and slowly you gave me your hand, and as a warning which you have never forgotten, I licked you. Trust me, it was degrading for both of us, but you had to learn of my true nature. I laughed, for you were a funny creature in your early stages, dear Humanity. I laughed as you jerked your hand away and scurried into your cave, frantically trying to soothe the burning pain. You then hid from me, dear Humanity, watching to see if I would lash out again. After a few minutes you cautiously crawled back, transfixed by my warmth. It was at that moment, dear Humanity, that you must have seen me struggling for life. With the food you initially provided consumed, my light began to fade, the shadows dimming under moonless sky, replaced by total darkness. Reaching out and grabbing a generous handful of dried grass and sticks, they were soon given to me for sustenance and I gratefully ate. You then sat and watched as I silently munched away,

you continuously feeding me and I providing light and warmth, warding off the dark. I believe it was this moment in time, dear Humanity, that we became, for a lack of better words, friends. Or I thought we were. Creativity was your downfall, and my weakness. You took me, dear Humanity, and brought on the evil for which I was created to consume. Your discovery of iron, dear Humanity, was the stepping stone which lead to the inevitable downfall of your species; for your creativity, your ambition, was just as much a curse as it was a blessing. With me as your slave you created weapons which brought on the destruction of civilization, every era bringing on a new method of killing one another. Your religious fervor served to help you in no way either, making me responsible for the deaths of millions, all because some worshipped and prayed to a god that you found inferior. From swords and bows to machine guns and bombs I saw them all. I had begun to believe that you'd reached the pinnacle of violence, but on that day in 1945, I then truly learned the meaning of extinction. You had done it. Congratulations, you achieved the ability to exterminate all life on this planet. Are you happy? Because, I am not in the slightest. As I burned, I cried over the innocent life which was slain, I cried over the technology, art, and culture lost all for the pursuit of some inexplicable political gain. For these things, I am sad.

I stated before, dear humanity, that your seemingly endless creativity was just as much a blessing as it was a curse. You took meat, gave it to me, were pleased when I handed it back, blackened and toughened from my heat. You then ate, satisfied with my performance. You revealed an alternate way for me to exist, conceiving ways which preserved life instead of always taking it. Coal's discovery was a god send for both of us, and with it brought on a new and glorious age of science and technology. Steam power allowed goods and people to travel across countries at alarming rates, electricity from power plants established a stable source of

light that brightened cities and promised growth. As coal wore out, oil stepped in to take its place, creating automobiles and the ability to fly. You found ways to sustain me that I surprised even me, using the elements to go to the stars. It is in these things that made me find peace and happiness, knowing that there was good in you somewhere.

Dear Humanity, you might be asking yourself what I truly think of you. We have known and worked together for millennia, and I do have an opinion about you. I view it as yin and yang, good and bad coexisting, essentially life itself. Some of your creations were for the good of mankind, others a weapon of war. Then there were things that originated from war which are now used to better society.

But, I do have one request. I implore you, take stronger strides into the betterment of all, not of just a few. Use your ceaseless creativity to fix the problems of this world we share, and not just create more for us. Though I do now know the road ahead, I do know how far we have come. You have come from a feeble being to the top of the food chain. And that, is pretty great.

Warmly,

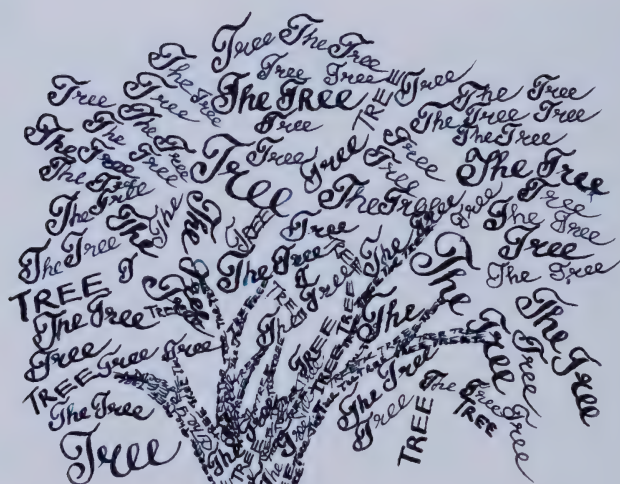
Fire



Leah Tewari
Title: Geese on the Hudson
Medium: Oil on canvas
Size: 24" x 18"

Goodbye to Goodbye

Luwam Ayele
Fiction Category Winner



Selam waited patiently, as the hard rain poured as it often does in Eritrea, soon it would stop and as it did the sky turned gray and the clouds swirled around the sky. Her father sent her out to buy beles, or prickly pears, the merchant was only three blocks away from her own home. It is best to eat beles right after it rained, since they are cold and sweetest. She walked down the street and saw the seller; who was serving another man when she arrived. She waited patiently behind the man, a large bowl hugged to her chest until it is her turn. After a while, she sighed, aggravated over the picky nature of the man in front of her as he picked and choose, looking over the beles. After a minute, he turned around, surprised at her quiet presence behind him, she looked up as he did and her voice got caught in her throat, "sorry." He apologized for the wait, but Selam could not speak to reply. "You can go ahead." She blinked, "No, no, no, please- take you time." She blushed and hid her face. He was very charming, and very handsome, "no, no. Ladies first." He insisted, and backed away to allow her to the fruit. She blushed, and hid her face with a whisper of a "thank you," and stepped forward. Usually she was very good a picking the best of the fruit, but her mind could not focus as the man behind her looked and waited for her, all she thought of was his smile. After a minute of her mind blank, she quickly picked her fruit out, "please, let me pay for you." The man stepped forward, reaching to pay the merchant, "no, no, no. I have the money to pay. It is alright." She insisted, almost pushing his hand back. "I insist." After another minute of the small insisting between the two, the man managed to pay for her beles. She thanked him kindly, blushing hard. After, it only took him a second to buy his beles and pay, easily joining her as she walked back to her home, a small smile on her face, they talked small talk for a minute, "I haven't seen you before here. Where do you live?" she waved her hand, in a fruit-

less demonstration of an invisible map, "oh! I live only three blocks, really around the corner." She explained, motioning with her hands a map, "I've never seen you before, where do you live?" he smiled, motioning with his hand, down a street, "Just down there. You can see my home." She quickly glanced where he pointed and spotted the rows of homes, "How long have you been living there?" "oh, only about three weeks." She nodded, understanding why she hadn't seen the man before. "I'm Daniel, by the way." He held his hand out and she took it, "Selam. It is very nice to meet you." She felt the warmth in his hands and just how they felt around hers. Selam suddenly realized the fruit in her hands and the need to get back home, "Oh! I am so sorry. I really must be getting home! I was so nice to meet you." Before she could go, he gently touched her arm, "when will I be seeing you again, then?" she smiled, looking at him gently, "You'll see me again soon. I promise." He smiled warmly back to her and held his hand out, "take care them, Selam." She took it and surprised as he pressed his cheek to her right side of her face and quickly she acted, pressing her left side to his and then back to her right, "take care, Daniel." She blushed hard and turned, heading quickly back home.

Selam came back home, late of course. She opened the door, sheepishly. Her father was on the couch, where she expected, her mother was making the traditional coffee, her sister was watch-ing a movie. Her father started grunting, clearing his throat, "why are you late?" she quickly stood straighter, "the line was long. And the regular merchant was sold out." He looked at her sternly, and she started talking with her fee hand, motioning in the direction of the merchant, "The man we usually buy from as sold out, so I had to go further away, and even there the line was long as people came out to buy beles after the rain." Her mother stood up and seemingly believed her fib, but her father gave her a stern look, obviously not believing his daughter, but not pushing her further. Her mother was gentle, and open mind-



Tucker Fraetis
Title: Daydream
Medium: Oil on canvas
Size: 11" x 14"



Ju-Ian Shen
Title: Self Portrait
Medium: Oil on canvas
Size: 20" x 24"

ing. Her mother was never one to judge another. Her father, however, was a priest. He was most concerned with his image, and followed the rules of god, "Do not ruin my name," he would often warn his children, all nine of them. Most of her siblings were girls, and he would often warn them never to have sex or even to make connections with men so rumors would not move around, with warnings of going to hell to scare them into complying with their father.

That night, before going to bed she was getting ready for bed. Washing her legs and skin gently, her thoughts roamed back to Daniel, and she went back over their encounter in her head, smiling, now alone, a wide smile. How his hair moved, and his eyes seemed so bright and warm. His smile, how it was so cheerful and light. She blushed and hid her face in her hands, before looking up and seeing herself in the mirror, smiling. "Am I crazy?" "No, I'm not crazy." "Why am I obsessing over this man? I've only met him for only a few minutes?" "It is not obsession." "No, it is just... a crush. He's just good looking. Beautiful." "Hey. You better not be loving him right now. He may have a girlfriend, you know." "But what if he doesn't? Could I be his girlfriend?" she blushed harder at that and hid her face from the mirror. The door opened her sister walked in, cutting off Selam's ramblings and causing her to head to bed.

At around 8, the next morning, there was a knock at the door. Her mother was sweeping the room and was the one to open the door. A child was there, with a letter, "yes?" her mother asked kindly. "Is Selam there?" "Why is that?" the kid smiled a grin, "Her school mate, Diana, sent a letter for her." Her mother instantly melted the suspicion, "Oh! Let me go fetch her for you then." It was only a few minutes before Selam came to the door and saw the child, "Selam?" She nodded, "I am Selam." He held the letter out and she took it, and the kid motioned for her to lean in, she gave him her ear and he told her a truth, "it isn't from Diana, the letter is from Daniel." Her face instantly brightened, though she held back

the smile as her mother was nearby, "Oh. Okay. Thank you." She nodded and accepted the letter from the child, who then turned and left. She found a quiet spot to open the letter and read it carefully. It was small and simple. It was directions to meet him. Across their home, there was a mountain, with little or no buildings there. At five at night, she was to meet him in the mountain. She blushed, excited with butterflies in her stomach, but excited none the less.

After their first meeting, they agreed to meet in the mountain, every three days at 5, since no one goes up there. One day, however, as they were in the mountain about to leave each other for the night, Daniel was serious and turned to her, "Selam, I love you. How do you feel about that? Do you feel the same?" she blushed instantly, and couldn't looking dead in the eye, "I-I don't know. Give me a few weeks and I will tell you." He smiled and nodded, accepting that answer. It took her two months, for her to decide. She felt bad, making him wait for her to answer his question, but it was how it was supposed to be. They met in the mountain again, but he is acting strange, not looking at her, instead to her feet and at the floor. She was excited, with good news. "Daniel?" he still wouldn't look up at her, and meet her gaze. She reached out and touched his head, pushing it up to look at her, "why do you no look at me?" He looked not quite a bright as he usually did, "I am a son of Adam. I am looking to where I was made. You are the daughter of Eve, you look to where you were made." She looked at him, smiling, "You know why I am going to say 'yes' to you today?" he brightened up, "You are going to say 'yes'?" she smiled wider, "It is because you are smart, and a humble man." He stood up and engulfed her in a hug, the both of them excited.

It was a year, before their relationship was found out by her parents. After they met, one day, he started to push for their relationship, to sleep together as a husband a wife. For two weeks he pushed this topic on her, and she ignored him for those moments, "I am not going to lose my virginity

to you." She broke one day, "I wish to keep it till my wedding night. For my husband. Why do you not ask your parents to send for mine for marriage?" he backed tracked, saying things like, "not ready for marriage" and other phrases. He then turned, "if you love me, then it is not that big of deal." She felt guilty after that, from their little argument. The rest of the day, she pushed him to understand her love. Every chance she got, she told him she loved her, and explained the trouble with her father, and the importance of her virginity and how she loved him, but couldn't and how she was sorry. He broke, however, and said, "forget it" and left her, walking away. She tried to walk after him, yelling his name, but he soon disappeared into the crowd. She stopped and kicked the ground, not helping the tears that fell down her cheeks, both in rage and in sorrow. Why could he not believe her and trust her?

The next morning, she went to the mountain, alone. Her heart broke as he didn't show up. A day turned into a week, and she still hadn't seen Daniel. She was so worried about him, and started murmuring to herself again, "he waited for me for a year. He's been with me for a year. I trust him. Do I trust him? Yes. Of course." She stormed home and quickly found paper and a pen-cil, and wrote a letter and went back out, handing it to the nearest kid who knew him.

That night she waited in the mountain, nervous, but hopeful. It wasn't long before she heard him walking up the mountain. She spotted him, and her emotions bursts, a mixture of happy and mad. Her eyes swelled up with tears and she kept her mind full of contradicting questions and emotions, how could he go a week without seeing her? She couldn't help as he came straight up to her, into her arm's length, and her arm raised and she slapped him. He grew still, speechless as they locked eyes and there was a pause. She raised her hand again to hit him again, but he grabbed her arm this time and pulled her into him, hugging her close, "why. Why did you leave me? I feel as if I am in a dark place





Joseph Nettles
Title: Hilsea Lines
Medium: Oil on
canvas
Size: 16" x 20"

alone. I feel as if I am in a very deep hole." She struggled to pull away from him, but he held his grip. She cried into him for a while, before finally she calmed down, and he let her go once he deemed it such, "Please," she looked at him puffy eyed, "I will do whatever you ask of me. Just, please, don't ever leave me again." She hugged him, close, and out of desperation, "Okay, okay. Salem. I won't leave you again, I promise." He hugged her again, trying to calm her back down. That night, however, he didn't ask her for anything.

One morning, Selam, threw off the blankets and ran out of the bed, running to the bath-room and vomiting. And often she went to the bathroom to use it, more often than normal for her. Her mother watched her daughter, as yet again, Selam went to the bathroom to either vomit or to use it. Her mother was perceptive, and suspicious again. She looked up, to a portrait of Jesus that hung in the wall in their home, "Lord, please don't let my suspicions be true." She prayed, shaking her head.

Selam was afraid, and nervous. After all they did not use a condom, but what were the chances of her getting pregnant the first time? She took a friend, and they went to the hospital for her to just confirm she wasn't pregnant. However, as the doctor broke then news, she had a mixture of fear, but hope, as this could have pushed Daniel to marry her. The first chance they could meet, she broke the news to the expecting father, in the mountain. His face wasn't of excitement, or nervous, as her's was and had been, rather, he looked of shock and of suspicion. Salem never thought he would be shocked, rather that he would be happy and excited, that he was going to support her and help her, "are you not happy?" he smirked, almost laughing, "What do you mean you're pregnant? We only did it one time? How are you pregnant? Are you kidding me? It isn't a good joke, I don't like these types of jokes?" he slowly grew grimmer. She couldn't help the tears that ran down her face, "Excuse me?" she was confused, at his response, "are you Daniel? You were

the one that asked me, that pushed me to have sex. I wanted to wait till marriage. You are the only one I've ever laid with." She couldn't believe him, he was so different than every time she's ever seen or met him before. He started panicking, raising his voice, "I-i-i-I don't know. I'm young. You're young. You can't be pregnant. You-you, please, remove it. Get an abortion. I can't handle this, I can't support this. I'm not responsible. I'm not going to be a father. I'll give you the money, just get rid of it." He turned as he yelled this, walking back down the mountain, leaving her.

Selam, tried many times to contact him again, as her stomach grew. He ignored her letters, and hid from her as she went to his house. Selam went to her mother in a panic, and her mother, rather than her father, spoke not harshly to Selam, and even helped hiding the pregnancy from her father. It wasn't long before, however, that word of Selam's pregnancy reached the rumored ears of her father and he found out, and immediately kicking Salem out from their home. Selam, however, couldn't come to hate the father of her child, part of her still loves the man. She prayed, every day, to God to send Daniel back, to open his eyes of his mistake and come back to her. She found a place to stay, he aunt's home, who thankfully took her in.

It was six months, and she carried wheat with her aunt, not too much, but helping as much as she could. She felt off, and tired. She felt just off in a way. After she helped her aunt, she went and laid down in a bed, to rest off the illness that bothered her. However, her dream was a night-mare causing her heart to race and her to gasp awake. She felt off still and sticky, looking down at her legs, they were covered in blood. She yelled, for her aunt, for someone. Instantly, her aunt held her, trying to sooth her panicking niece, "my poor baby," knowing that Salem had miscarriage. There was nothing to be done to save the child. Selam let her aunt hold her, and her mind racing back to Daniel, who told her to abort their child, a product of their love and their time together. She



Camrynn Coale

Title: 12:34 P.M.

Medium: Watercolor, thread and ink

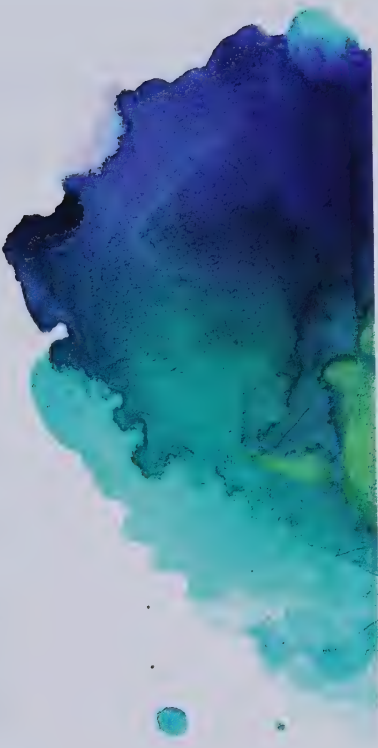
Size: 9" x 6"

cursed him; she cursed him to see no sun, no moon, no stars. She cursed his rivers and oceans to dry up. She cursed him out of the rage in her heart and the death of their child. She cursed all be-ings, human and animal alike, to go after him, to attack him. She cursed him to wish his death, to hate himself, yet he can never reach death soon enough. She cursed him to suffer. She wished it was him that was miscarriage in his mother.

She breathes, she moves on. She tried to move back to her old home, with her father and mother, and asked and begged for her father's forgiveness. And what would a father to do, when his child comes to him for forgiveness. She was grey, dull. She did not leave their home, and ate very little, suffering from the after effects of her pregnancy miscarriage and the events that are re-lated to it. Though it would have been tough to raise her child, she was devastated. Her dreams were filled of her chasing after a child, a boy or a girl, with features of herself and Daniel. She slept as much as able, to see that child that could have been her's. she fought to move on to keep walk-ing and breathing. Her family helped her to move on, to continue. Though Daniel never came to see if she had a child, or see if she had a miscarriage. Selam eventually came to understand Daniel, and though not fully forgive him, but move on. He was, to her, the type of man who would not change, and she had to accept that. She started school, to help her move on. Her father sat her down, and told her, "you cannot cry again and again at the same problem. Do you laugh at a joke you've heard many times?" "No," she said, "than you cannot cry at the same problem. You need to move on, you need to continue." He pushed her and inspired her, to continue with her life.

One morning, however, there was kid at her door and asked for her. He asked her to follow her, and she was suspicious at the kid, who pushed and pulled at her, insisting that she followed him. She followed the child and he led the familiar way to Daniel's home and she paused outside, "I do

not want to go there, why did you lead me here?" the child shook his head, "no, come. You will regret it not to follow me inside." She hesitated, but eternally followed the child into the home. Quietly she followed the child to a room that smelled of death. In the bed, laid Daniel, who was fighting the reaper. Though she'd never thought to see him again, she couldn't fight the tears fall-ing down her cheeks. He was so egotistical, so brash. Her memories of him thinking he was invin-cible and could do as he like, and yet he couldn't do as he wished there. He raised his hand, lowly, and beckoned her to his side. She did as direct, behind her, murmurs of a heart disease, but she ig-nored them and focused on Daniel. She leaned down to his head, and he spoke low and raspy, "Selam." He paused, "please. Forgive me. Forgive my mistakes to you." She sat up, tears on her cheeks, but stoic, she looked at him, at death's door, and nodded, "I forgive you. For everything." She gave a small smile, "it's alright." She could see the relief in his eyes, though he couldn't speak very well. She spoke, lowly, of what she did after he left her, very little detail into the miscarriage, but into her school and the excitement about that. It wasn't long before his eyes glazed over and his chest gave a raspy breath, and didn't raise. She spoke a few more minutes to him, holding his hand before she said good bye to him and his family. She learned, that she can control her hate, and her love. But she cannot control death, her death, or anyone's death. She promised herself, that till the day she die, she will work not be a bad person, but to be good.



Let's Take a Look at the Burnt Bulb

Jeff Steuber
Poem Winner



At the end of the lane
There is a tall, lanky street
lamp
With streaks and patches of
rust
And grass overgrown at the
bottom.
Which during the night flick-
ers
On and off.

When that light flicks off
An eternity exists during that
time
Like it has never been on
And it will never be on.

And it feels that way only
until that street lamp flickers
on
Bringing with it life that re-
plenishes the soul
Like flowers blooming and
bursting with life
After a terribly harsh winter.
And it fills you with joy;
It is a moment of pure ecsta-
sy.

But then it goes off once
more
Before you have a chance to
properly enjoy it

You are plunged back into
that long dark stay
Back into another eternity.

And whoever is watching
that streetlamp
Is left with nothing
But the hope that it will flick-
er on once more.

Outset

Jesse Gonzalez
Fiction Category

This was my first time on the subway in over three years. Inside, it was packed and reeked of countless odors that leaked from the hundreds of people that were packed together in the subway car. Everyone was quiet. Now I remember why I locked myself in my house for three years. I became inconsiderably reclusive since my dog, Patsy, died. Patsy was all I had and after she passed away I barely went outside. I didn't watch TV, I didn't read the paper, I went back to my old flip-phone. I was completely shut off from the outside world; and I did not care, until now.

I was on my way to the public city library. As far as relearning how to get out of the house and interact with people, it was a start. Everyone seemed to be staring at me irritably for some reason and it was making me feel uneasy. I wondered if I had something on my face. I used my shirt sleeve to rub my face, and I hand-combed my hair. Why are all these people looking at me? Some of them were frowning and some had looks of puzzlement. I wish this subway train would hurry and get to my stop, which was finally next.

The woman seated next to me had on a fur coat and a little bit too much perfume. I could not tell how cheap the perfume was but it definitely burned my nostrils and made me nauseas. I needed some fresh air. This lady's perfume is ratchet. The intercom went on: "Now stopping at Bowery and Delancey Street."

Thank God.



Nikki Oliver
Title: Here is gone
Medium: Collage on paper
Size: 14" x 11"



The woman turned and looked directly at me. "You are so rude! Shame on you! Humph!"

I got up, readying myself to exit, and said, "Excuse me?"

She didn't even bother to look at me. I left the train. What was that about?

I went to the library and spent a few hours there. There were only a couple of people there who were using the computers that were in the center of the building. I wasn't surprised, as these days no one hardly went to the library. In fact, hardly anyone read at all anymore. Reading had become a thing of the past, something primitive. I left the library with a backpack full of checked out books and one in my hand- a poetry book by Khwaja Abdullah Ansari.

As I walked down the sidewalk on Mulberry Street, passing by a young mother and her daughter, I accidentally dropped the book, and it landed in a puddle of water. Fuck. I thought. That's going to be a fine. I kept walking. As I was doing so I could feel the mother's eyes on me. She was now walking faster and her feet were landing harder on the ground.

"Hey!" she screamed. "I'm talking to you!"

She was now in front of me. "Yes?" I asked.

"You need to watch your language around children. My daughter's only five years old!"

"Wait- what? How did you hear what I thought?" I asked.

The little girl frowned at me and nudged her mother, giving a look that read, "Mommy, what is wrong with that man?" The mother scowled me down then they quickly walked further away, as if I had done something unforgiving. "Maybe coming out to the world again was a mistake," I spoke aloud.

"The mistake is everywhere, my friend. Look around you. The world has changed. To be a human being is not the same anymore." I looked over. There was a man watering

his plants outside his apartment on the first floor. He was a dark-skinned man who looked to be in his late sixties. His voice was slow and steady, his eyes were of a serious nature. "What happened?" I said.

"The launch and popularity of Mindochips," the man replied. "You must not get out much."

I ignored the last part. "What is a mindochip?"

"They were released to the public three years ago. They're tiny microchips that people install below the surface of their scalp, and it works with the brain to receive mental transmissions, from other people, regardless if the other person has one. It works with the cerebral cortex or something like that. At first, only the rich could afford them, then, two years ago, they became easily affordable to people of practically any income. Now, nearly everyone has a Mindochip."

What kind of science fiction story am I in? The Outset?

"Do you have one?"

"Hell no! I didn't even buy a smart phone until 2038. That was many years ago. I won't even think about buying a brain phone. I like to verbally communicate with people, and, I don't want to know what people are thinking. Although, nowadays, that's different. Everyone knows what everybody else is thinking. People don't even have private thoughts anymore; they've learned to manage them. There is no privacy. If someone next to you has a bad haircut, it's considered rude to even think about it."

"That explains a lot." I said.

"It's how they regulate us, or, most of us anyway. They found a way to control public thought. Privacy is becoming extinct. No thought is kept to yourself."

"How is this legal?"

The man gave a mellow chuckle. "They, can do whatever they want. As long as they keep the public distracted, no one will take a stand. If they do, they'll get shut down real quick."

I am surprised how much has happened in a span

of three years. The modern world changes fast. Someone could sleep in and they would miss out on a new trend of eye color. I've been sleeping in for three years and I missed a whole new piece of cerebral technology. That is why everyone seems to be so quiet. They are all talking to each other in their heads.

"Thank you for all of the information." I said.

"No. Thank you for not submitting to the shepherd."

I walked away. I have never really been good at controlling my thoughts and now here I am, walking through New York City, surrounded by millions of people with telepathic abilities. I hope I don't get arrested. I need to hurry back home. Now that I was aware of what was going on, I noticed advertisements and stores, high end and low end, showcasing Mindochips: Share thoughts, and know yourself better. The effective kind of communication.

I think I might throw up. They really were tiny microchips. I started to wonder if I would ever be interested in such a device. It's something that I have thought of before. They are appealing. I always thought telepathy was an interesting phenomenon, but not like this. This is crazy. Maybe I'm dreaming. I don't think I am. I hope so.

I decided to walk back home, which, by refusing to take the subway, cost me an extra two hours. I didn't mind. I haven't taken a walk through the city in three years. I must admit, it felt good to be outside. The wind against my skin, the breath of air that wasn't trapped inside an old house for three years. It all felt good. Everything except for the feeling of exposure. It wasn't a feeling I preferred. The good feeling went away and was replaced by an ample buildup of anxiety.

Down the block from my house, I passed by a boy, probably around sixteen, getting arrested. I heard the boy screaming, "I didn't do anything! Let me go!" The police officer replied, "I am arresting you for jaywalking and suspicion of attacking a police officer. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in

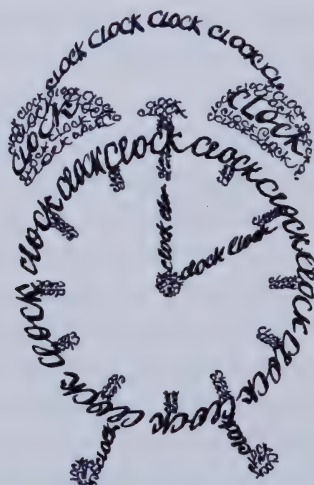
a court of law."

"I'm sorry!" the boy screamed. "I only thought it in my head! I wasn't actually going to do it! Are you crazy! Please let me go! My mom will freak!"

This was the new world that I was living in, and I didn't want any part of it. It was a scary place before, and now it became something of a prison of the free mind. People learned to silence the voice inside their heads out of fear. Nothing was kept only to the self. Everything was heard, unless someone learned how to utterly control every aspect of their mental voice. I saw on the mega TV street crime had significantly dropped, that was good, but free will and emotion had become on the brink of extinction.

I walked to my door, opened it, and closed it. I had one last stop. I walked to the pet store a few blocks away and came back with a two-month old puppy and a heavy bag of puppy dog food. It was a jack terrier. I would name him Peeps. I walked in my house carrying Peeps and the food. I closed and locked the door. I sat Peeps on the carpet, and looked at him. "Well, I guess it's just you and I, Peeps."

He tilted his head and barked. I loved the dog immediately.



A Childhood Built from Trees

Avery Symes
Personal Essay

Daily the sun continued to torch the skin of three young kids tired of swimming in the five by five neighborhood pool. Soon enough, my siblings and I decided it is not even worth going outside anymore, but boredom would never let us have our way. When the sun finally lost its shine to a cloudy day, we saw our opportunity to again enjoy the outdoors once more. We lost interest in the small, crowded neighborhood pool and forgot what fascinated us so much about the outside world. All three of us recently moved from the Big Apple to peacefully city of Charlotte. We did not have much experience with the abundance of open space, bushes, forests, and any other form of nature that was not as prominent in the concrete jungle. As any excited five-to-ten-year-old would state, when boredom strikes, so does curiosity. Eventually, my older brother said four small words that led my childhood down a path of endless adventure: "Let's explore the woods".

That is where the adventure began. As we crossed the line where the world behind us ended and the forest before us began, we immediately got struck by a different type of shade. A cooling and calming shade never experienced before, that made us wonder why the first half of our summer was not spent in this magical forest. As we continued to walk through the canopy of dark green trees we gazed in amazement, fully taking in our surroundings, and bending our necks were like we were at a planetarium. My little sister and

I felt safe and comfortable as we followed blindly behind our line leader of a brother, who we now know was just as lost as us. The further we wandered into the dangerous woods the more we became desensitized to the occasionally jitters we got from a squirrel scattering quickly up a tree or the rustle from a nearby bush. Eventually, we crossed paths with a small stream, but to three small city kids, it seemed like a gushing river that carried the blood of the forest. We decided to follow the river to its source, in hope to find the heart of these majestic woods. We spent what might have been hours of our day traveling up the side of the river completely oblivious to the time passing. We completely forgot our goal as we stared at the mushrooms growing at the side of the river, the birds singing their songs at the top of the trees, and the thorns that grew into a fence separating our curiosity from the gushing currents. Simultaneously, the sight of our surroundings dimmed as we realized the day was ending and we had no clue where we were in reference to the heart of the forest and more importantly our home.

It was too dark to see anything but our own feet repeatedly hitting the ground, so we just continued to walk, following in each other's footprints. Of course, at the time none of us owned a cell phone to call for help. Just as we started to believe we will never get home and we had just become dinner to a hungry forest, our next steps were into a clear field. As our heads raise and eyes adjust, we slowly realize we were safe and sound in our own backyard. We had not realized it at the time, but we spent our whole day following a walking trail that cut through the suburban neighborhood.

Every day for the rest of the summer and the next four summers to come, we spent the majority of our time exploring, building treehouses, playing games, and truly enjoying that magical forest. Every day since we first stepped foot into those woods, the forest has always led us home. The forest gave us an opportunity to grow closer as siblings because our vivid imagination. Looking back now, I realize that we

never found the heart of the forest, but maybe because the forest was the heart to our childhood.

The forest is the heart of our childhood, but also the foundation of my lifelong journey and my unique personality. One man's trash is another man's treasure. Many people may view that path as a simple walking trail, but when viewed from the perspective of three young kids, the woods became the world's largest playground. One may say living in an artificial reality is inauthentic, but from those experiences I have developed an original and extremely authentic personality. I have learned to have an optimistic view about all of life's experiences one obstacle at a time. No matter what I come across in life I approach it with positive energy and thoughts in order to see positive results. My siblings and I entered those woods searching for fun, excitement and adventure, and as a result that is exactly what we received. This proves that our thoughts create a reality because anybody could have seen a boring old walking trail and decided to go back inside with the AC and video games, but for those 7-8 hours we were lost explorers in the heart of the Amazon Rainforest. Many say seeing is believing, but for me believing is seeing. If you truly believe something, you can alter anything the way you want. The forest has been the foundation to building such a different personality over time, making me unique in many ways.

Even though when in the forest I create my own reality, it is when I'm being the most like myself. It may seem that I am very imaginative, but in reality, I just view various things from different perspectives. No one could have possibly known that from something so simple as exploring the woods I would develop this trait. However, this skill has followed me from the young child I was, to who I am now. My childhood was built from trees, but so is my future.



Nikki Oliver
Title: Roanoke 1989
Medium: Acrylic and collage on paper
Size: 14" x 11"

Anatomy of a Fatal Crash

By Maria Mazzacco
Poetry

*Y*ou cringe just reading the title
as I did that text message,
The deafening roar of August cicadas cannot fill the silence
of your twisted SUV resting on a church lawn.
Now stretching its chassis towards God, junkyard, and the
horror
of seemingly staid metal escaping its perpendicular planes.
I pray the churchgoers don't make you an emblem,
with uninvited calls for your soul.

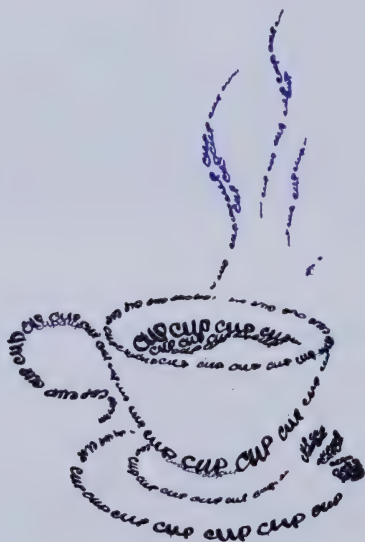
I pray you didn't wait until after the telephone pole,
terrified and terrifically flying through the air,
across the intersection,
skipping along a truck bed,
soaring over a car,
and rolling up an embankment and on and on and on...
I pray that others can slow down and look away,
because I can't seem to.

You left a mark.
Splintered wood, shattered automobiles,
and all of us happy to have survived the commute.
You left us terrified of the crossroad.
Like blinking confused streetlights,
and a cadre of first responders piecing the puzzle,
we wring our hands and walk in circles of disbelief.

Grain Free Wheat

By Dusty M. Wallace

*W*e are a generation lost in race.
Space age technonauts without much taste.
We waste time, but we will live to be two-hundred.
We hate rhymes, so I'll stop.
Now this will feel uncomfortable, because there should be
rhythm and I have robbed you of that.
That's one dead rat away from disgusting, I know,
But I won't regret it.
We're like Jazz, some cats, they just don't get it.
Supplement:
Try hard and fall far and break your head
Or stay in bed and get blood clots
We'll never know that we're dead.



I Am a Burning Man

By Ben Wolf

There is something
Unbearably beautiful
In fire
Each tongue of flame a work of art
Slimmer than the thinnest ribbon
Brighter than the finest dye
All the more enticing for being

U n t o u c h a b l e .

But I have touched the fire
I have felt it burn
Because I could not bring myself to back away

I
Wanted
And by the time I realized
What it was I longed for
It was too late

The fire was determined to make me beautiful, too.



3005003091

Hurricane Romance

By Lydia Ryan

We started out small and spun for a while.
In the middle of nowhere with no end in sight.
The faster we turned the stronger we grew.
Not knowing the damage we'd leave in our wake.
When we stopped spinning we fell apart.
Nothing left but tears raining around us,
And no way to pick up the pieces.



